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WHY CHURCHES ARE DESPIRITUALIZED

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Not all churches are despiritualized, and the purpose of this article is not to prove they are. Its real purpose is to call attention to the primary need of all church life. Humanitarianism must feed upon religious faith or it is likely to grow perfunctory. But religion must express itself in well-systematized social service.

For fifteen hundred years the Christian church placed her main emphasis upon the teaching of the right relation of the individual to God, and relegated the matter of the right relation of the individual to his fellows to a subordinate position as but incidental to the life of a Christian.

As a result of this teaching, the people believed that the highest conception of a Christian life was that of an individual in constant communion with God, and the church taught that this state was obtainable through prayer, church attendance, self-mortification, and self-deprivation of worldly pleasures; and as the supreme joy of a Christian's life was to be found in the church and at her services, church attendance became regular, devotional, and spiritual, and the power of the church over her members was almost supreme.

Over a hundred years ago a new ideal of Christian perfection began to take root in the teachings of the church, or, rather, there was a resurrection of the ideal which had guided the life of the church during the three centuries following the crucifixion of Christ and which gradually faded until it became entombed during the so-called "Dark

Ages"—the ideal of the Christian's duty to bring the glad tidings of salvation to those living in paganism.

The Christian then began to perceive that his duty was not only to save himself, but also to save others. This conception of a Christian's mission gradually unfolded until the church began to teach that the only way by which an individual could enter heaven was through aiding some brother or sister along the road leading to that goal. This missionary teaching induced many to dedicate their lives to the bringing of the "gospel of Christ" to the people of the non-Christian lands.

The foreign missionary work gradually awakened in the church a realization of the importance of Christ's evangelistic teachings and of the need of doing the self-same work in their own country and in their own city. Revival services, rescue missions, and missionary enterprises of all kinds began to occupy the chief attention of the churches, and the spirit of neighborliness and brotherliness commenced to dominate the Christian life.

As an outcome of this teaching the churches became filled with regular attendants, the various departments of church life were conducted enthusi-

astically, and the spiritual life of the church body was a power so mighty as to be almost unconquerable.

The Rise of Social Interest

About thirty years ago people generally began to discern that the physical needs of the individual and his spiritual growth were rather closely interlinked, and that environmental forces exercise a powerful influence on human life. Through their half-century of missionary experience they had learned that, as a general rule, if an individual were to be turned from his sinful mode of living to enter permanently upon an altogether different kind of life, he must be removed from his evil environment or such environment must be improved or purified. They also found that to make their evangelistic work effective so that new recruits to the army of Christ might not desert the standard, they must wage an unrelenting and absolutely destructive warfare against the economic, industrial, and social forces and conditions which oppose, impede, or hinder the living of a Christian life.

Careful studies of the lives of men and women in the various strata of society and of the environmental forces which influence them in their daily living were made, first by painstaking investigators, and later by governmental commissions and expert social surveyors; and the facts and conditions revealed were published broadcast, with the result that human emotions became so aroused and the humanistic spirit so stirred that many Christian people began to devote themselves to ministering to the physical necessities of the poor.

The longer they labored in this field the more clearly they realized that environmental conditions and a decent standard of living had a direct powerful effect on the spiritual life of man; and as a result of this experience their enthusiasm for altruistic work, spurred on by the taunt that the church does nothing for the laboring man in helping him to bear his burdens, in improving his working conditions, or in making brighter his environment, soon caused the large city churches to depart from their old-time methods and to establish settlement houses and physical-relief stations.

As a consequence, the average city pulpit began proclaiming as its chief message the duty of the Christian to visit the sick, to feed the hungry, and to provide shelter for the homeless. To remediable work was added subsequently the task of removing or renovating the conditions which bring about poverty, disease, and sin.

So extensive has become this social-welfare work that the church is compelled to devote to it a large part of her time and the old-time preaching of "soul-saving" has been superseded to a considerable extent by the doctrine that the chief way to fulfil one's Christian duty is to work for the improvement of the physical conditions surrounding the lives of the people.

Today this preaching is visualized in the work of the social settlements conducted under the auspices of the Christian church. In most of these settlements, the managers are so desirous of helping the unfortunates to overcome their defective or improper education regarding household economics

and the care of the family, and of providing a recreational center for tired, work-worn men and women, that they have excluded all religious services, Bible-reading, prayer, and evangelization from their work in order that no religious prejudice may prevent the people from making use of the instrumentalities found at the settlements.

Nearly all settlement houses conducted by Christian churches are non-religious in character and purely secular in their life and activity. As the teachers and workers at settlement houses are, in most instances, church members who are volunteering their services on account of the teachings of the pulpit, is it a matter for surprise that the idea is rapidly spreading that to be a Christian one has only to devote himself to the helping of others to become efficient workers and to the removing of those things which may hinder the living of a free and untrammelled life?

The Dangers That Resulted

From this attitude of the church, Christian people generally have come to believe that Christianity means social service and that theology is but a relic of the so-called "Dark Ages" of the church's life. The pendulum which for so long a time pointed to the teaching of theology as the sole aim of the church has gradually swung around to the opposite side of the arc and now points to sociology as the cardinal doctrine of Christianity.

If Christian sociology, or unselfish social service, comprises the *whole* of Christianity, then why support the church by personal attendance at her services or by individual work in con-

nection with the life of the church? If Christianity is *fully* expressed in terms of social service, then why devote time to Bible-reading, prayer, and communion with God? So have Christians reasoned and so are many Christians reasoning.

The average non-churchgoer reasons substantially as follows: If the chief work of a church is to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, provide medical aid for the sick, teach domestic science, and furnish innocent forms of amusement, why should I attend church services and why am I not doing all of my duty in contributing to the charity organization society, the district nursing association, and the various other agencies engaged in the same kind of work?

Today altruism has largely superseded churchly Christianity, and social service in a very material manner has made of many churches in our land a social club or an executive committee for the engineering of social activities. Church attendance, in most cases, is the outcome of a long, unbroken habit, or is due to the individual's desire to hear an address which may prove an intellectual treat, and as a consequence the spiritual life which formerly dominated the church is at a low ebb.

The secularization of the activities of the church has weakened its spiritual life and emptied its pews of devout worshipers. This fact is patent when a comparison is made of church attendance when the eloquent pastor conducts the services with the great decrease in attendance when his assistant is occupying the pulpit. The retroactive effect of conducting non-religious institutions has chilled the spiritual life of church

members and, for a great many, has banished Christ to a throne far off in the heavens.

One of the chief reasons for the growth of the American Socialist party and the rise of a new cult with each new moon is the unsatisfied yearning of the soul after God and the failure of the individual to find spiritual refreshment in the church.

The remedy for this condition, which has now become so marked as to be a regular subject of discussion in the newspapers, the magazines, and the novels of the day, is to be found in a return to the teachings of Jesus Christ. Wrong, indeed, was the church, in the past, in placing her *exclusive* emphasis on the teaching of love to God, expressed in church attendance, prayer, and self-sacrifice of the things of the world; and equally wrong is the church of today in placing her *exclusive* emphasis on the teaching of "love to man," expressed in social service. Stress should be laid equally on the commandments of "love to God" and "love to man."

The Social Gospel Not Anti-Spiritual

Christ never separated his activities into two classes, secular and religious. His mission was to transform men into the likeness of God; and to accomplish that end he taught them a new way of life and healed them of their afflictions. His aim was twofold: to bring men into the right relationship with God and so to spiritualize business, politics, education, art, and recreation that whether men eat or drink or whatever they do they will do all to the glory of God.

Then how can the church become the true exponent of Christ's teachings and

thereby become a greater power for good in the world?

First: Let each large church, or a combination of small churches, conduct a social settlement wherein the chief aim is to bring men and women into right relationship with God. And in addition to the present activities of the non-religious social settlements include such religious exercises as may achieve the divine end for which the settlement is conducted.

Let all settlement workers realize clearly that "man does not live by bread alone," but that, in addition to material help, he needs spiritual uplift and a high and noble motive in life; that it is of but little use to lift people out of the treadmill of daily humdrum existence and to remove their terror of poverty with its evil attendants unless they can be given a new viewpoint of life and a goal toward which to aim. It is indeed true, as is stated by Dr. Charles A. Richmond, that "when a man is hungry he wants a potato, not a Greek root, and when a man is sad and discouraged he wants a kind word, not a theological dogma," but a man who is given a "potato" or a "kind word" is not likely thereby to become better morally, and therefore he is not receiving all the help which a Christian can and should give. By ministering to the physical and environmental needs of the individual a Christian is but preparing the way for the more important work—that of unbarring the doors of the heart that the better angels of man's nature may come forth to take possession of his life. The church's work is not merely humanitarian on the lowest level of materialism; it is humanitarian

on the highest level of recognizing the spiritual as the essential.

No material agency reaches the heart of the problem for the reason that the problem of helping permanently the "down and out," the tempted, and the overborne is not the problem of playgrounds, of dance-halls, or of settlement houses; the problem is a moral and spiritual one. Material agencies are valuable and important aids and auxiliaries, but they will not transform men and women nor create within them character, the foundation of right living.

By the addition of spiritual teachings in the training of the individual for becoming more efficient as a breadwinner, and by the improving of his environmental conditions, the church will be fulfilling her highest mission, and by thus spiritualizing all her activities the life of the church in turn will become spiritualized.

Second: Let the church establish adult Bible classes for the study of Christ's teachings on the live, everyday, practical questions arising in the business, political, and social world.

This course of study should be established for two reasons: (1) the solutions of economic and industrial questions have too long been confided to the schools and colleges, where these subjects have been considered and taught solely from the materialistic viewpoint, with but a passing reference to the human element, which should be the starting-point in the approach to all such questions; (2) in the teachings of Christ are to be found the methods to be adopted for the settlement of international controversies and of industrial disputes; the attitude toward the crimi-

nal to guide the lawmakers in the framing of laws for the care and treatment of prisoners; the kind of legislation to be enacted to check the rapidly growing divorce evil; the principles to be adopted by the individual in the acquisition and distribution of wealth; and the attitude to be taken by the individual toward work, amusement, and the various activities which make up the sum of human life.

Third: Let the church realize its obligation toward the education of the child.

The three great educational agencies are the home, the school, and the church. The average home life does little toward instilling into the child's mind those fundamental religious principles which form and shape the character; the public schools do little else but train the intellect, leaving the character practically untouched; and the church, through its regular services, exerts but slight influence on the lives of the children of its parish, as but few of the young people receive the direct religious help they need. The Sunday school reaches but a small fraction of the children and the utter inadequacy of its work must be apparent when we take into consideration the limited time devoted to religious training and the practical impossibility of securing the attendance of children most in need of religious instruction, namely, those having no one to look after them and those whose parents are indifferent to the claims of religion.

As the church remains content to exert her spiritual influence on but one day in seven, and then only on those whose inclinations have placed them-

selves under her influence, she must not be surprised if the life in the home, in the school, and in the outside world outweighs and nullifies her teachings and militates against the increase in enrolment of devout communicants.

The mission of the church is broader than the mere observance of the Sabbath and the teaching of religion on that day; her true mission is to teach religion seven days in each week.

Let the evangelical churches in each city co-operate in the work of conducting a religious school in which the whole boy may be developed—where he will receive physical training, intellectual training in the subjects prescribed by the state board of regents, general manual and vocational industrial training, and religious instruction.

That such co-operation of evangelical churches is possible may be gathered from the action of the Presbyterian, Disciple, Baptist, and Congregational bodies in Chicago in establishing the "First Chinese Evangelical Church of Chicago" and uniting upon a constitution, which, among other things, provides as follows:

This church shall instruct its members from the Scriptures with regard to the fatherhood of God, the divinity and saving grace of Jesus Christ, the work of the Holy Spirit, the inspiration and authority of the Holy Scriptures, the sanctity of the Lord's day, baptism, and the Lord's Supper, and the fundamental necessity of living daily, with God's help, in harmony with the teachings of Jesus Christ.

The expense of purchasing land, erecting a school building, and furnishing the necessary equipment would be too great to be borne by the churches at

the present time and it is entirely unnecessary for them to assume such a burden. In all large cities are Young Men's Christian Association buildings containing classrooms and gymnasiums, and, in many, equipment for educational and industrial training. These facilities might be used to conduct schools in which the boy would receive physical training, mental training in those subjects required by the board of regents, special manual and vocational industrial training, and religious instruction according to the plan agreed upon by the co-operating churches.

The conducting of such a school would undoubtedly cost a large sum of money, but would not the result of its work warrant the expenditure? This is generally recognized as a godless, religiously indifferent age, and if religion is to take its proper place in individual life and in society the young must receive the education which considers character as its chief end.

A similar school for girls could be conducted in the Young Women's Christian Association buildings, the expense of the same to be borne by the co-operating churches and by such a charge for tuition as may be deemed proper.

Fourth: In order to draw children to the church, in addition to the present activities provided for them, start a Boy Scout band and a branch of Camp-Fire Girls; let the boys and girls use the church parlors as a meeting-place for their clubs and societies; and if there is a large yard adjoining the church allow it to be used as a playground. By so doing the interest of the child will be directed toward the church, a sense of

obligation to the church will be awakened, and a bridge constructed between the child and the activities of the church over which he will pass easily.

Fifth: In order to attract men to the church, organize a men's club for holding monthly meetings to be addressed, if possible, by out-of-town speakers on live, vital topics of the day. Also organize a social-service body, composed of men and women members from as many churches as can be induced to join in the movement, the meetings to be held in the church parlors. This latter body, organized solely for making a social survey and for social service among the citizens of a town, village, or city, would have a platform broad enough for every citizen, whatever his creedal belief or his church connection, consistently to stand upon.

A short time ago a labor leader remarked: "I never enter a church because the church does nothing for the laboring man." The view taken by this man is not an exceptional one; there are many laboring men who hold the same opinion, wrong though it be. To meet this situation, extend a cordial invitation to each labor union to select a delegate to serve as a member of the social-service body.

After having organized your group, conduct a seminar with weekly or bi-weekly meetings at which committees from the group will make reports on the result of their investigations, the reports to be followed by a general discussion of the facts presented. Among the sub-

jects for investigation may be suggested the following: immigration, housing conditions, wages, hours and conditions of labor, and a living wage.

As a result of investigations along these lines there will undoubtedly be suggested ways and means to correct the evil conditions that may be discovered, so that the town, village, or city may be made a place which will aid and not retard any citizen in living a Christian life.

Let men see that the church is taking an active interest in the lives they lead during the period from Sunday to Sunday as well as on the Lord's day, and they will soon join hands with church members in general welfare work and appreciate the duty and privilege of becoming members of a church.

Sixth: After men and women and boys and girls have been attracted to the church, they can be kept from drifting from it only by keeping them constantly at work; such work to be done from the sole motive of expressing their love for God in obedience to the divine commands and in compliance with the doctrines of the church. Let each member be given some definite church work to do, something which he is capable of doing, and then when he has done any work, be ready to praise him whether the work be worthy of praise or not, provided it was done to the best of his ability, and thereby each member will be encouraged to do more and better work in the future and will become bound more closely to the church.